



COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee convened in a regular meeting on Monday, February 3, 2014 at 301 W. Second Street, Room #1101, Austin, Texas.

Subcommittee Members in Attendance: Mayor Pro Tem Cole (Chair)
Council Member Morrison
Council Member Riley

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Cole called the Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

1. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION

Ms. Carol Martin, Vice President of River Cities Neighborhood Association, stated there is an enormous amount of interest of people communicating their concerns regarding Woodland Avenue. It is very complicated and the citizens are asking Council to allow them the time to understand the options and report back to the different organizations.

Dr. Martina Blum, is a neighbor that lives on Summit stated she had never heard about this reconstruction is against it and would like to see some engineering studies regarding this project.

Mr. Dave Snow, lives on the East side of I-35 and have been there off and on since 1949. The key note here is to know that there are very few East/West roads that go from I-35 all the way over to Lamar in the Southwest Austin area. So by closing these roads you limit the ability for people East of I-35 to go all the way over to Lamar using the Annie/Mary roads combination. Mr. Snow really likes the two alternatives there were presented by staff.

Mr. Fred Krebs, Area Seven Coordinator for South River Citizens, stated as much as staff as stated they have informed the citizens, Mr. Krebs stated he has not seen any information pertaining to this project. Ditto what the other speakers has stated and this will severely impact his neighborhood. A lot of people in his neighborhood are high tax payers.

Mr. Kemp Dixon, is very pleased to hear of those two alternatives that were presented by staff during the presentation. He would be very happy if one of those alternatives was used and the access to their neighborhood was not cut off.

Mr. Gus Pena, use to live in that area and stated he doesn't believe that outreach from staff has been presented to the African Americans and Hispanic's regarding what is happening in this community. Who will benefit from this? It must be a better use of this process. Listen to the community.

Ms. Hyden Black Walker, a native Austinite stated these changes will add more traffic on frontage roads and add more problems. The frontage roads are very dangers and staff should consider about how to make these areas safer.

Ms. Alix Scarborough, an Allendale resident, addressed the overall of superstreets and frontage roads. She stated the superstreets are very complexed and provided an illustration of how this cross street would look.

Ms. Toni House, a member of the South River City Citizens and East Riverside Oltorf Neighborhood Planning Contact team. Her concerns was TxDot was aware that a portion of Pleasant Valley Road and Oltorf, east of I-35 are designated as future core corridors which will increase the traffic quite a bit once those are built out but very pleased to hear of alternate proposals.

Mr. Larry Sunderland, stated he has been reaching out to neighbors and will continue until the City considers not blocking their access to Woodland. Closing that off and forcing them to the access the frontage roads they will continue to be in this battle. We do not want our access blocked directly across to I-35.

Mr. Rick Price, resident and property owner of East Travis Heights and take Woodland every morning. If you close Woodland you are forcing everyone to go to Oltorf or Riverside and you are creating more traffic and not making it easier.

Mr. Larry Goad, live on Woodland Avenue and feels no pedestrian or cyclist would travel to that area just to go over that new bridge.

Mr. Girard Kinney, this issue will involve all of the neighborhoods and re-enforce this will cause a problem through the length of I-35.

Mr. Mark Terramella, concerned about the population increase east of Austin and really like the options that have been presented today, keeping Woodland open going East and West.

Mr. Jerry Mylius, there are a lot of businesses along I-35. Most afternoons on the frontage road the traffic is backed up passed his office. Sometime it takes people about 10 minutes to get through the Oltorf or Riverside exit. At this time we need more east flow traffic. Please come up with an alternative to keep Woodland open.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

March 3, 2014 – Approved the February 3, 2014, minutes on a 2-0 vote with Council Member Riley off the dais.

3. UPDATE ON THE MOBILITY STUDY AND PROPOSED MODIFICATION OF THE WOODLAND AVENUE EXIT EAST/WEST TRAFFIC AT ITS INTERSECTION WITH I-35

Mr. Robert Spillar, Director of Transportation and Mr. Steven Miller, Project Manager for HNTB (working on behalf of TxDot).

Mr. Spillar began to discuss the plans of the I-35 Capital Area Improvement Program (CAIP) of the Woodland Avenue. This is an early process and is only a concept at this point. Staff has been working with the community and a number of outreach programs. The CAIP stated with the City of Austin but has stretched into Hays and Williamson Counties to improve the mobility of the city's traffic.

The purpose of the overall CAIP study is to increase capacity, better manage traffic, enhance safety, optimize existing facility, minimize additional right-of-way, improve east-west connectivity, improve compatibility with neighborhoods and enhance bicycle, pedestrian and transit options. This is a multi-phase effort which consists of 5 phases: conceptual planning for corridor, implementation plan for corridor, environmental/design studies, construction plans, right-of-way and utilities coordination and letting and construction. This project is a community driven effort which we have held 90 stakeholder meetings since 2011, eleven public open houses, two on-line open houses (April 2013 online – over 1000 visitors and June 2013 online – over 3000 visitors and comments), website, forum, twitter and Facebook and community events. Also, a roadmap for improving I-35 from SH45N to SH45SE has been implemented as well. The overarching concepts are future transportation corridor (FTC), ramp modifications, collector-distributor roads and innovative intersections.

Mr. Miller discussed the preliminary design concepts which are subject to change because these concepts will be refined as the project development progresses. Add CD under Riverside, add U-turn bridge, reconstruct/expand

bridge, improve alignment, possible closure of Woodland to through traffic and construct bike/ped crossing at Woodland (if closed) and provided a visual of I-35 at Woodland Avenue. Fixing the vertical curve over Woodland could require closure of Woodland to through traffic, sub-standard main lane geometry reduces vehicle speed and impacts traffic flow, through traffic and left turns on Woodland would use new U-turns at Oltorf and Riverside, new bicycle and pedestrian bridge would be constructed to maintain east-west connectivity. Mr. Miller discussed other current concepts I-35 at Oltorf Street, I-35 at Stassney lane and I-35 at William Cannon Drive.

Mr. Spillar again stressed this study is very early in the process and encouraged the neighborhood to invite the team to attend their meetings so together they may work out any issues.

Council Member Morrison, asked about the challenge at I-35 and Woodland being two-fold. One being the vertical rise and the second being the horizontal curve, ensuring you are not taking out the horizontal?

Mr. Spillar, stated no. That problem can be corrected by either correcting the horizontal curve or the vertical rise. By fixing one you can fix the whole problem.

Council Member Riley, asked Mr. Miller about the design of keeping Woodland under the main lanes it seems that would be a lot easier than taking them over the main lanes?

Mr. Miller, stated on the east side the grades are rising so quickly, that it would drop the grades and couldn't catch them and there is another street that ties in at about 150 feet of the frontage road as well.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, stated after listening to the Citizen's testimonials. She asked the question of there not being enough concern about the traffic within the neighborhood?

Mr. Spillar, stated that staff has certainly looked at both cross traffic and traffic up and down the corridor and they are trying to balance the two. Again we are very early in the process and no decisions have been made. We will continue to reach out to the neighborhoods as this process continues.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, asked about Superstreets?

Mr. Spillar, stated Superstreets are a range of technology intersections. If this is something we would go with, it will reduce the number of on/off ramps. There is a variety and a whole lot more studying that needs to go into the process before a determination that Superstreets would work. They do work in urban areas.

Council Member Riley, asked about the configuration of the crossing at Woodland design speed?

Mr. Spillar, stated the design speed and speed limits are different. You usually want your design speed to be higher than your speed limits that are set. At this time we are trying to reach a consistent design speed of 60 throughout the Corridor.

Mr. Miller added that the design speed of 60 they have referenced is for the I-35 main lanes and for the frontage roads they are currently looking for a lower speed of maybe 30-35 because it is within an urban environment.

Council Member Riley, asked if before we get into the design process will the City Council and any other public body have an opportunity to make a decision to either approve or disapprove a particular option?

Mr. Spillar, stated he believes there will be a lot of opportunities for approvals or disapprovals discussions along the way.

Council Member Morrison, thanked staff for their presentation and also the comments from the audience which gave her a much deeper understanding of what we are looking at and what are the issues.

Council Member Morrison, asked if staff was considering either improving the plan or insuring it is consistent with other things?

Mr. Spillar, stated that one thing they have tried to do is meet with neighborhood associations up and down the corridor when they have asked staff to come and meet with them.

Council Member Morrison, asked if staff was paying attention to the frontage roads and what it is going to do to the adjacent neighborhoods?

Mr. Spillar, stated that is part of the ongoing process.

4. BRIEFING ON THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINAL DOWNTOWN ALLEYS REPORT, WHICH EXAMINED THE RENOVATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF DOWNTOWN ALLEYS, SAFETY AND CREATION OF MORE PEDESTRIAN ORIENTED EXPERIENCES

Ms. Heather Way, Vice Chair of Downtown Commission, discussed the direct support of the Downtown Austin Plan as being a dense and livable pattern of development that supports a vibrant day and nighttime environment,

an interconnected pattern of streets, parks and public spaces that instill a unique sense of place and community, a beloved fabric of historic places, buildings and landscapes that celebrate the unique journey Austin has taken over the past 200 years, an array of innovative businesses small and large that are attracted to Downtown by its rich human capital and unique sense of place and a variety of districts and destinations that support the creative expression of Austin's citizenry through art, music, theater, dance and performance.

Mr. Chris Jackson, Downtown Commission Alley Activation Workgroup, explained why activate Austin's alleyways. Activated alleys play a central role in enhancing the character and livability of dense urban areas, provide a diverse range of public spaces, can respond to a broad range of users, support economic development, support layered functions, utilitarian and commercial. Instead of remaining as grease traps and a place for trash bins. Some logistics or challenges to address are heavy concentration of dumpsters, poor lighting, special events permits.

The potential for future alley activations are improving public safety and beautification of downtown, providing opportunities for engaging public spaces places for people to visit, relax and enjoy being with other people. Celebrating visual and performing arts by creating areas to showcase the work of local artists, expanding the pedestrian network and connectivity to other parts of downtown, highlighting historical assets and providing intimate retail zones. Cities that are currently leading the way in alley activation are San Francisco, California, Fort Collins, Colorado, Melbourne, Australia, Sydney, Australia, Seattle Washington, Chicago, Illinois, Los Angeles, California, Brisbane, Australia and Perth, Australia.

Ms. Way, described some of the policy recommendations, recommend a change to the Downtown Plan to call out the policy goal of establishing a program, with support of surrounding businesses, to renovate and enhance downtown alleys to serve as lively pedestrian walkways, new spaces for artists and small businesses, and vibrant gathering spaces. Also, the Alley Master Plan identifying and classifying alleys based on potential for activation; establish design guidelines and enhancements strategies; create implementation plan with prioritization for capital improvements that could plug into CIP process. The Catalyst Activation Projects, while preserving the role of alleys for trash pick-up, create a program to remove and consolidate trash dumpsters in alleys and, over time, change the appearance of remaining dumpsters to make them more attractive.

As far as names for alleys, adopt a process for naming Austin's downtown alleys and creating street signs at entrances of the alleys. Also, adopt design standards or guidelines for new development along alleys to address the "back side" of buildings. Currently, there is no City staff that oversees or addresses

alley support. Therefore, there will be a need to develop a plan for how city staff could support temporary and permanent alley activation projects.

Council Member Riley, thanked the presenters for coming and asked for explanation of the role or support for City Staff?

Ms. Way, stated that Public Works is repaving a lot of our downtown alleys, but there is no department that is overseeing the new lighting or new trees.

Council Member Riley, asked if they had identified within the alley ways where we could accommodate small businesses?

Ms. Way, stated no not at this time.

Council Member Morrison, thanked them for their work and committed on the half million square feet of alley (open space) which is a pretty stunning number for possible resources and the City really needs to think about that and how it would benefit the community.

ADJOURMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Cole adjourned the meeting with no objection at 4:00 p.m.